Exploring Environmental Health Literacy through an Intersectionality Lens: Content Analysis of P30 Funded Centers of National Institute of Enviromental Health Science (NIEHS)

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

Environmental health literacy (EHL) is crucial in empowering individuals to make informed decisions regarding environmental factors that affect their health. It involves understanding and acting upon various ecological concerns such as pollution and climate change. While the NIEHS has emphasized the importance of EHL, particularly through its P30 funding to research centers, there remains an unexplored area of how these centers integrate EHL within the scope of diverse social identities such as race, gender, socioeconomic status etc.

Focus

The central concern of this study is to reveal the integration of an intersectional approach within current EHL research and identify areas where improvements are necessary. By systematically analyzing the abstracts from NIEHS-funded P-30 centers at four universities, the research seeks to uncover patterns and trends that reflect the integration of intersectional considerations. Ultimately, the goal is to provide actionable insights to enhance EHL initiatives, ensuring that environmental health education is accessible and effective for all communities, regardless of their social identity.

Research Gap

Previous research has inadequately addressed the extent to which intersectionality—a framework that examines how overlapping social identities affect individual experiences—is represented in NIH-funded studies concerning EHL. This gap is particularly concerning as EHL must consider race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and socioeconomic status to effectively promote environmental justice within diverse communities.

METHODS

Overview

On the current study, a quantitative content analysis is employed. The methodological approach involve collecting abstracts from NIEHS-funded P-30 centers using the NIH RePORTER database. A codebook developed, comprising of categorical codes that reflect key aspects of intersectionality and EHL, such as mentions of minority populations, methodological approaches, and intersectional considerations like race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Two different coders independently apply the coding scheme to the abstracts to ensure consistent data capture. The coding process produce quantifiable data that will be statistically analyzed to reveal patterns and trends concerning the integration of intersectionality within the EHL research funded by NIEHS. This rigorous approach aims to identify current practices and gaps in incorporating diverse social identities into environmental health literacy initiatives, with the ultimate goal of enhancing inclusivity in environmental health education and community engagement.

Objectives

This study aims to bridge the research gap by accomplishing the following:

- Assessing whether P30 NIH-funded centers incorporate considerations of specific minority populations in EHL research and community engagement.
- Analyzing the methodologies these centers use to reach and gather data from diverse populations.
- Investigating the extent to which the studies address intersectional factors like race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and socioeconomic status, and how this integration impacts the efficacy of EHL initiatives.

Variable	Categories	Definition	Relevant Research Question
Minority Groups	Minority Groups Mentioned	Instances of explicit mention of specific minority groups within the study's content, such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, women, etc.	RQ1: Do the studies acknowledge the importance of incorporating specific minority populations in EHL research and community engagement?
Methodological Approach	Inclusive Methodology Used	Descriptions of the methodologies used that are tailored to include or reach diverse populations.	RQ2: What methodologies are employed by these studies to potentially reach diverse populations?
Intersectionality Focus	Intersectionality Addressed	References to intersectional analysis or considerations within the study, addressing factors like race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and socioeconomic status.	RQ3: To what extent do these studies address intersectionality in EHL?

Table 1. Methods. Summary of coding scheme.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

From our initial analysis of the abstracts, although many articles address various health disparities and inequities, a limited number delve into the role of literacy as a contributing factor. Our findings so far reveal that, among the articles mentioning EHL, only a subset explicitly considers the intersection of multiple social identities influencing EHL.

These articles tend to isolate ethnicity as a singular factor, without probing into the relation of other social identities, such as socio-economic status, that may contribute to observed disparities. In other words, discussions around EHL vulnerabilities often lack a multi-dimensional analysis.

To illustrate, articles have not thoroughly investigated why certain groups, like immigrants with lower socio-economic status, are more prone to environmental health inequity. There is a gap in recognizing the complex power systems and hierarchies at play that create these disparities. The data so far suggests that a more intersectional approach, which considers how various factors such as race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and socio-economic status intersect to affect EHL, is needed in the current literature.

As this research is ongoing, final conclusions are pending. However, these preliminary observations point to potential areas for improving how EHL research addresses the nuanced needs of diverse communities. Our aim is to identify how future studies can better incorporate a multi-faceted lens to understand and tackle environmental health literacy issues comprehensively.

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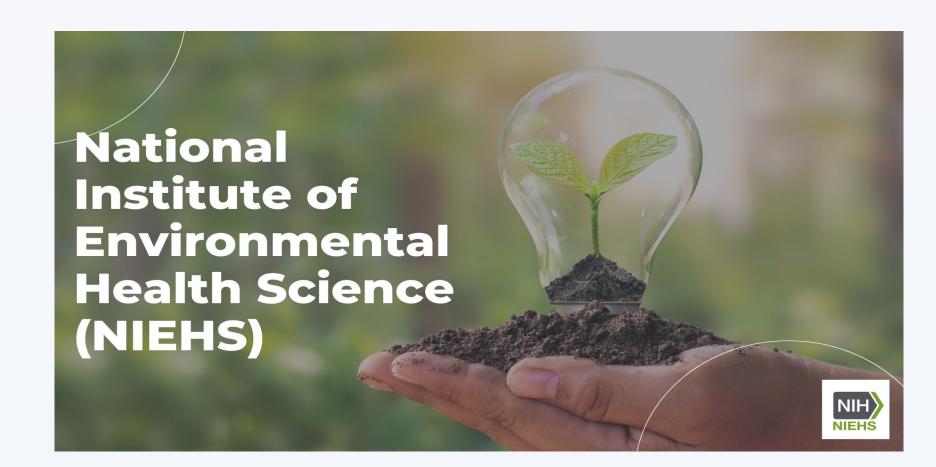
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KEYWORDS

Environmental Health, Enviromental Justice, Environmental racism, intersectionality

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